UNITED NATIONS

World Chronicle

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GUEST: **AMB. RICHARD BUTLER**
Chairman
United Nations Preparatory Committee for the Fiftieth Anniversary

JOURNALISTS: Norberto Svarzman, Televisa
Linda Fasulo, NBC News

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UNITED NATIONS FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY

AMBASSADOR RICHARD BUTLER, Chairman of the United Nations Preparatory Committee for the Fiftieth Anniversary, reviews the achievements and shortcomings of the world organization. Over the last 50 years, the United Nations has concentrated its efforts on solving international disputes and providing security for States. Now is the time for the international organization to shift its priorities to the security of human beings. The United Nations should also put its house in order by trimming and streamlining its bureaucracy. Ambassador Butler calls on Member States to demonstrate their political will to reinvent the United Nations to meet future challenges.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

This year, 1995, the world commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of one of the truly defining events of the history of mankind -- the establishment of the United Nations. As a universal international organization, it was created to maintain world peace and security and to work for social progress. A forum for all nations, the UN represents the highest aspirations of humanity for a world free of war, poverty, repression and suffering. Has the United Nations succeeded in its mission, and do its achievements of the last 50 years warrant world-wide celebration? And is it willing to chart a new course for the next century?

Ambassador Richard Butler, the Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations, is our guest today. He is also Chairman of the United Nations Preparatory Committee for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations. Joining me to talk with Ambassador Butler are Norberto Svarzman of Televisa and Linda Fasulo of NBC News. Ambassador Butler, welcome to **World Chronicle**.

BUTLER: Thank you, Michael.

LITTLEJOHNS: The answers to the three questions we've asked, some people might say, are no, no, and maybe. In other words, the UN has not achieved what it set out to do; the answer to the second question, whether there's anything to celebrate, might be another maybe; the last maybe being that the UN may not address the real problems to change its image in the next century. What is your feeling?

BUTLER: I'd give the opposite answer. I would say yes, yes, and certainly. You know, the key word you used in introducing this discussion was "aspiration". The aspiration of the United Nations, one that was applauded and welcomed all over the world after a devastating war that killed some 50 million people, was for an organization that would be dedicated to the things you mentioned -- peace, social progress, and decency amongst human beings. So the first answer is yes, because the United Nations has met that challenge. In 50 years it has provided a framework, unlike any other in any prior time in history, through which we could seek to resolve disputes by peaceful means.

LITTLEJOHNS: But how could you say that? I mean, throughout these 50 years we've had nothing but wars and rumours of wars. We've had -- what? -- 150, I suppose you could say minor, wars in the sense they have not been world wars, but on the other hand, what is minor? I mean, they're wars which have cost millions of casualties.

BUTLER: Well, the problem that we face in the public image of the UN, as you put it, is that it's very hard to see what didn't happen. Now, I said "a framework for the settlement of dispute". There have been countless occasions in the period since the end of the Second World War where the UN's presence, its ability to debate issues, to find means of peaceful settlement of dispute, and, where necessary, to send in the Blue Helmets, has prevented things from becoming a whole lot worse than they were. Now, sometimes you don't know that, because you can't see problems that were solved and didn't become open conflicts. You've got to ask yourself, what would have been the situation without it? You know, really, Michael, it's a bit like this -- take murder as an example: We all have a rule in our societies that says murder is wrong, and on the whole we obey it, but murder occurs. Okay, what do you do? Because it occurs from time to time, do you throw away the rule? The UN is just like that. Wars have occurred, problems have occurred, but you've got to ask yourself where would we have been if those rules hadn't been there? And why I say yes to your first question is because of my firm belief and knowledge that there have been many instances where the system of the UN has worked.

The same is true in the sphere of social and human betterment. It's one of the things the UN was able to do well while it was frozen in the cold war. It got on with vaccinating the world's children, with spreading clean food standards, and so on. I could go on and on. Simply, the UN created the fabric of the modern world.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador, you're a great promoter for the UN --

BUTLER: No, no, no, let me answer the last question. You say, "Is there a new future for the UN? Maybe." And I say, certainly. And of course, this is where I will be critical. The UN has made mistakes. It did become a bloated bureaucracy. There's an amazing amount that can be done and certainly needs to be changed. And what we must do at the fiftieth birthday is not just raise a glass of champagne -- a celebration that I think is deserved -- but go far beyond that and seize the opportunity to create a UN that really is an effective organization.

LITTLEJOHNS: Tell us a couple of things that you think the UN should do.

BUTLER: Well, it's got to change its agenda. You know, we had 50 years of being terrified by nuclear weapons, and of course they're still there, but 50 years of being simply terrified by nuclear weapons in the cold war, and 50 years, therefore, in which we concentrated on the security of States. We looked a hard lot at military things. Now we've got to shift the agenda and look at the security of human beings. It's the opportunity that the end of the cold war provides us, and it's the necessity of today's world. There are too many poor people, there are too many women suffering inequality, and so on. And the

UN's moment has come to change the agenda from the security of States to the security of the human family.

LITTLEJOHNS: Rising out of the Social Summit at Copenhagen?

BUTLER: Yes, and out of the Population Conference in Cairo, out of the Women's Conference in Beijing, and out of the Conference on Children. We have had six great global conferences in the post-cold war period. Take them together, and they constitute what I'm saying, the new agenda for the UN. In addition, fix this rather clumsy and outmoded bureaucracy to enable it to do the job, and then you've got a new UN -- a new agenda and a streamlined organization -- and we should be able to make a difference for the twenty-first century.

SVARZMAN: Mr. Ambassador, your words have been very touching. When you speak about bureaucracy, inefficiency, et cetera, we may agree with you. But is not the fault not of the United Nations, but you, the ambassadors of your countries? Because all the problems of the UN come because of the decisions taken in the General Assembly and the Security Council, and the Member States are not ready to do what is needed. On the contrary, they try to do worse.

BUTLER: Well, I think you've got a good point. The United Nations is, after all, an association of sovereign States, and the buck stops with them. There's very little that happens or opens or shuts at the UN that doesn't have behind it a resolution adopted by the Member States. They have been too attached to the notion of individual national sovereignty, they've been too attached to getting their hands on the jobs in the Secretariat, they've been too attached to political ideologies during the cold war. We've got a chance now to change all that. And I agree with you utterly, a good deal of the responsibility for changing the UN lies with the Member States. If we're going to have a modern, effective UN, then yesterday's thinking, yesterday's politics have got to start to catch up with tomorrow's problems, and that's in the hands of the Member States.

SVARZMAN: I'd like to follow up on what you said about the six major conferences. It puzzles me, this need to call major conferences to discuss things which are very worthy, but why are the organs of the United Nations not working? You are saying we need to promote a conference to promote children. What about UNICEF or ECOSOC, et cetera?

BUTLER: Well, there are some times that I think the way to change the agenda and crack open a problem that's become solidified is to use this device of a summit meeting. That doesn't necessarily bypass the Organization's concern. For example, the Children's Summit didn't bypass UNICEF, it gave UNICEF the Convention on the Rights of the Child and their Goals for the Year 2000, which have really reinvigorated UNICEF.

And that's a good example of a positive reaction between a summit and the institution that would then carry out the work.

But I think behind your question is an important criticism of the use to which the current institutions are being put. I agree, that is a matter of concern. Some of them are working well, some of them are working badly, and some of them are dead but won't lie down. You know, I really think some of them should be swept away. The institution has got too many parts to it. We need to consolidate and reform it.

FASULO: What are the prospects for reforming the UN, for breaking up or doing away with some of these bureaucracies that don't work?

BUTLER: Well, I think we're going to have a very difficult time. We've already started work on it, and there has been some consolidation. I don't minimize the difficulties involved. I'm hopeful that at the fiftieth anniversary General Assembly we'll adopt a couple of far-reaching decisions that will set up a means through which we can crack those hard problems. And I'm reasonably confident we'll do that. We'll set up, I think, a small group of ambassadors, and with some expert advice, to look at the UN institutions top to bottom and come up with some pretty dramatic suggestions for change. Now, the Under-Secretary-General for Administration, Joseph Connor, who's doing a terrific job, new on the job but doing a great job, said to me recently, "If you walked in here from outside and looked at this, you would be astonished." You would think, as he obviously did, no one could have designed this. I mean, it's a design from hell in some ways. And it has to be changed. Now, I'm not being just smart-alecky and critical of people in saying that. This was a product of the cold war. I'm not saying that some mad genius did this. This was a product of the cold war. The UN itself was one of the victims of the cold war. Each side of the conflict had to have their bit of the Organization and their staff there and so on, and it grew and grew, and it got to where it is today. It's a miracle, some would say a bloody miracle, that the UN --

LITTLEJOHNS: Some would say it's a bloody mess, too, I take it.

BUTLER: Yes, maybe! But that the UN survived, I consider that a miracle, that it actually survived. Secondly, that it was able to do stuff like vaccinate the world's children, and so on. Really, an outstanding achievement, partly in spite of the bureaucracy. But my point is not to lay blame on people, to accept that this is what history gave us, but to insist that at the fiftieth anniversary we must not lose the opportunity to look it squarely in the face, to look ourselves -- as you have suggested, Norberto -- to look ourselves squarely in the face and say, "Okay, enough." All right? The cold war really is behind us, this bureaucracy is designed in hell, let's change it. Let's give ourselves really streamlined

instruments to attack the problems that people face and that we know they will face in the twenty-first century.

LITTLEJOHNS: Well, there are about 35,000 people working for the United Nations in various parts of the globe, a good many of them here at headquarters in New York. According to what you've just said, and perhaps Mr. Connor shares your views, or you share his, does this mean getting rid of thousands of the staff?

BUTLER: I don't know what the figure would be, but I don't have any doubt that a serious reform of the institution would result in a reduction in staff, and people would therefore go. Now, that's not to threaten anyone with the axe, that would be preposterous. I'm not in a position to do that, and one has to be humane. The UN has already set aside -- I think the current level is some $15 million, which in the scheme of things is not that much, in order to give people a decent retirement, and so on. These things take a few years, it costs a little money, but the benefits should be fairly enormous. So, in brief, I guess the answer is yes, I suppose some people, drawing towards the end of their career, will go and they won't be replaced, because we'll be substituting more streamlined organizations. But more important than that is the overall political battle that we'll fight, which Linda referred to, and, you know, I really agree, it's going to be very tough. Some people don't want these changes. Some people have vested interests in the existing system, which amazes me, because I don't think it serves them well. But some people do. And I don't minimize the seriousness of the political battle we'll have in this fiftieth anniversary year to really do what we know in our hearts we must do, which is reintegrate and recreate the United Nations in a modern way.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is World Chronicle. Our guest is Ambassador Richard Butler, Chairman of the United Nations Preparatory Committee for the Fiftieth Anniversary.

SVARZMAN: Ambassador, one of the booklets distributed on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary speaks about the UN reinventing itself, just like government in the United States is trying to do without too much success. Is this going to end in more words and more booklets and with expressions of good will? What are we going to really do from now until September, until the General Assembly? Someone in the General Assembly is going to have the guts to start saying we have to do this and this and this? Or are we going to forget after the champagne, as you say?

BUTLER: Norberto, the truth is, in terms of ideas and proposals for change -- and maybe this is partly what you're reflecting on in referring to the literature -- we in fact have at our disposal an embarrassment of riches. There are any number of good studies and good ideas that have been done within the house and outside the house, in private

foundations and universities, on what needs to be done. And one of the problems we will have is to select from these very good works the most relevant bits and pieces that would amount to the correct package of reform. But, as I've already suggested to Linda, the critical test will be the political will to do it. And that's what has to be forged between now and the fiftieth anniversary session, and that's what then has to be expressed by that session in an uncompromising decision of the General Assembly that says the time is now, the task is real, we will all have to turn ourselves a little bit inside out, like an octopus, change our thinking, and really do it, otherwise this isn't going to be worth a row of beans. And that political will is the thing we have to find.

SVARZMAN: I take it that Australia will take a position. Is any other country ready to follow you?

BUTLER: Oh, yes, yes. And I wouldn't say that Australia is necessarily leading. There are many countries that are deeply interested in the thoroughgoing reform of the United Nations. Because everyone wants this body to succeed. Michael, this goes back a little to your introduction: In our world, public opinion is like Mark Twain's death, you know, reports of it are greatly exaggerated. Reports of people being down on the UN in my view are greatly exaggerated. Public opinion surveys in the United States, in my country, in Australia, and other parts of the world, show that everyone has goodwill towards the UN, they want it to succeed. Many people are justifiably very critical of its failures, but it's more in sorrow than anger. People want this place to work. And we've got to mobilize that here in the political heart of the UN to make sure that the UN does work.

FASULO: Ambassador, we know that the big donor countries are very interested in the reform of the UN, and there's certainly the political will to get it done. But what incentive is really there for the bulk of nations -- 160 or so nations -- that really pay very little for the Organization but have the ability to promote and organize programmes in the General Assembly? How do you see that shaping up? How do you get their support to tighten the Organization? Why would they do it?

BUTLER: They're poor, is one good reason for them to do it, as was illustrated at the Copenhagen Summit. Whether we choose to do this reform or not out of the goodness of our hearts, any decent morality and any rational good sense compels us to do it. One in five people on this planet go to bed each night hungry. This is after forty-odd years of throwing billions of dollars at development. The development gap has still got bigger. The number of poor have increased. Now, what does that tell you? We have to have been doing something wrong. How can you make such an effort and still have such a problem? The same is true in other fields of development. And if you look at the globalized way that

our world works today, it's no longer possible to say, oh, well, that's the poor South, but the rich North is doing okay. Many countries in the rich North have got a growing poverty problem and unemployment in some cases approaching 20 per cent. We don't have a choice in this any more. So that's my answer to your question. Any objective look at today's circumstances of poverty, unemployment, social breakdown, including in the host country, in the United States, points to the need for us to do things differently. So protection of the old positions and the old privileges in the Organization just won't wash. And that's a good reason for everyone supporting change, whether they're big donors or whether they're poor as church mice.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador, as we record this programme, the amount of money owing to the United Nations by Member States for the regular budget and peace-keeping operations is something in the order of $2.8 billion. The United States owes $1 billion, I think, for the regular budget alone. Do you think that in this fiftieth anniversary year it might be possible to get these debts paid and then begin with a new slate in 1996? Is this a target that your committee perhaps might set itself?

BUTLER: I don't think we can get the debts paid this year, and I deeply regret that. That's a very thorny problem, and it's a very dispiriting one. After all, it is a legal obligation, if you're a Member State, to pay up in full and on time. And they are words that, you know, I could bore everyone to death by saying over and over again, "in full and on time". Many countries do.

LITTLEJOHNS: Australia, I believe.

BUTLER: Australia always does. Many do, some don't. And, unfortunately, some of those whose share is a big amount of the budget don't pay up, at least on time. Now, we're not going to wipe that off the books this year with a big check or a stroke of the pen. But I think what we will do, and there is work underway now, is discuss, in the most serious way that we've done for a long time, the scales of assessment, the financing and budget of the UN, and try and have everyone to front up to it and recognize that if they're serious about a new UN, then they've got to get damn serious about paying their bills as well.

FASULO: Do you see any support for reducing the US assessment?

BUTLER: To peace-keeping?

FASULO: To peace-keeping and the regular assessment of --

BUTLER: Well, the US assessment for the regular budget went down to 25 per cent. I admit that's probably almost 20 years ago now. And now the bigger pressure from the US is to reduce their peace-keeping contribution from some 31 per cent down to 25. There's not a lot of support for that, but I think that's -- obviously not, but I think that's one area where there's a kind of inevitability. I mean, I think the US contribution in

peace-keeping will go down, and that will mean that there'll be, I don't know, some 7 or 8 percentage points of the peace-keeping budget that will have to be spread to others of us. And work is going on now on seeing how that could be spread around. I don't particularly want to comment on that. What can you say? You're talking about a country that's paying such a large share, and you've kind of got to acknowledge that, you know, that's big. On the other hand, if it is on a per capita or capacity-to-pay basis, the US is not more heavily taxed than anyone else, even though that it's more or less richer than anyone else. I think the US citizen pays some $8 a year per head to the UN.

SVARZMAN: Ambassador, at the beginning you said the UN should be praised for the effort to keep peace, to avoid more conflicts. But then you touched on the questions of poverty and unemployment, et cetera. So it is really a big failure, not only the UN, but all the international organizations. What can be done? Do you have any clear idea, other than words, and more words?

BUTLER: On what?

SVARZMAN: On poverty and unemployment --

BUTLER: I see. Well --

SVARZMAN: Just a concrete plan to do it.

BUTLER: Yes, well, that's what we did at Copenhagen two months ago, and there are very concrete steps that are available to be taken in the field of poverty eradication. Poverty can be cut up into exactly what makes it up, or what defines it -- the absence of clean water, the absence of a sanitary system, a certain minimum amount of food per day. Now, that's been agreed upon at the summit level. It's now up to both the international institutions and individual countries to act accordingly.

SVARZMAN: And they will?

BUTLER: I'm reasonably confident that they will. What was done at Copenhagen had never been done before. There had never been such a measure of international agreement on exactly what's required in, as you say, concrete terms. And it was committed to at the highest political level. Now, I know within the UN system, for example, the programmes are going to be adjusted to give effect to those actions. All Member States should do the same. I'm reasonably confident that that will happen. Unemployment is a more difficult problem and very much more in national hands. But again, if there was a want of agreement on what steps are required, what concrete actions need to be taken, that agreement was given at Copenhagen. It's now up to states to do it. That's a harder area, but I'm reasonably confident that we've focused attention on unemployment in a way that wasn't previously done, and that should produce some action.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Butler, we have less than a minute left. Tell us a bit about your committee. Are you running the celebrations? What is the function of your committee?

BUTLER: My committee has as one of its principal functions to negotiate amongst all Member States the declaration of 1995, the vision of the future. And that's proving to be -- what shall I say? -- interesting.

LITTLEJOHNS: You mean difficult.

BUTLER: Yes. [LAUGH] But I think --

LITTLEJOHNS: You want to do it by consensus.

BUTLER: Well, we have to. It has to be adopted by consensus, and it must be good, worth reading, and relevant. And you've got 185 countries with at least 185 points of view. So I'm having, you know, heaps of fun presiding over that. But that's the main thing we'll be doing.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Butler, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**.

BUTLER: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: Our guest has been Ambassador Richard Butler, Chairman of the United Nations Preparatory Committee for the Fiftieth Anniversary. He was interviewed by Norberto Svarzman of Televisa and Linda Fasulo of NBC News. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

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